

## **Youth Voices Project Links Philadelphia Youth Opportunity Program with Temple Students**

*[Temple University's University Community Collaborative of Philadelphia (UCCP) launched a pilot project-Voices from the American Street Youth Opportunity Center -this past summer with support from the Philadelphia Youth Network. Temple University students served as mentors to both in and out-of-school youth who designed and carried out their own community based research projects. Future plans call for expanding the project to youth at all three of Philadelphia's Youth Opportunity Centers—American Street, North Central, and West Philadelphia. The Centers are supported through a Youth Opportunity Grant from the U.S. Department of Labor.]*

*The articles below appeared recently in UCCP's newsletter, Partners for Change. The Office of Youth Services thanks Barbara Ferman, Director, UCCP, for making the articles available to us.*

### **Articles from October 2001 UCCP Newsletter**

#### **Youth Voices from the American Street YOC**

*By Natalie Acevedo and Latasha Cryor, American Street YOC, Youth Voices Students*

During this summer, working with the Temple Voices program was a nice experience. We had a chance to work with some of the students from Temple. We did projects that influenced us to want to change the way things are. For example, it made us want to change the way women are viewed in the world today. It also made us want to change the way that people judge things without even getting to know it first. As they say, "Don't Judge A Book By its Cover."

Hi, my name is Natalie Acevedo. My experience in working with the 'Temple Voices' was great. It made me realize all kinds of things, like how older people judge teenage kids just by what they hear. They don't take the chance to listen to what the youth have to say. At our center, when we were working with Temple Voices, we had the opportunity to present our point of view to youth as well as adults. It also was a great experience for us teenagers to express how we feel.

Hi, my name is Latasha Cryor and I was one of the people in the 'Temple Voices' program. I learned a lot of new things. Along with doing work we also had fun. Out of all of our projects, the most interesting to me was our ending project. What we did was break up into groups and each group formulated their own project. My group's project was on how women are viewed in the world today. Doing this project gave us a chance to hear what the other youth at the center had to say about the matter. Since it is very rare that you hear about what youth have to say about things that go on in the world, it made the project very interesting. Not only did the voices of other youth get heard but our voice was heard too. After all of my learning experiences throughout all of the projects we did, I was motivated enough to comeback and continue participating in 'Voices' this fall.

## **A Success Summer: UCCP and American Street Youth Opportunity Center (YOC) Complete Youth Voices Project**

May of 2001, our first cohort of “Voices” graduated from YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School. Although proud of their accomplishments, we will miss working with them. It was back to the drawing board for us. Over the next month, Cathy Smith and I worked hard to recruit a broad range of new voices for our summer program. By July 1<sup>st</sup> we had assembled an exciting team. For the next six weeks we had the honor of guiding and learning from nine members of the American Street Youth Opportunity Center and seven Temple undergraduates. We met five days a week, from 10 a.m. until 2:30. As a group we identified important issues, developed key research skills and carried out a wide variety of projects. In the process, we built relationships, developed critical thinking skills, traversed the city, explored Temple’s campus, ate lots of pizza and donuts, discussed and debated, laughed and had fun. By the middle of August, much had been accomplished. Divided into three sub-groups, each group of young people designed and carried out a multi-step research project addressing an issue that was relevant to their lives. One group looked at the role of women in the music industry, the second explored the impact of video games on youth and the third asked how their peers viewed women wearing provocative clothing. In addition to preparing a formal research report, the groups presented their findings to the steering committee of the UCCP and to their peers across the city at the Philadelphia Youth Works Convention.

As we embark on a new unit of ‘Voices’ this fall, we are hardly starting from scratch. Additional youth from the American Street YOC have been recruited to join two Temple undergraduates and two youth who are returning to build on their summer experience. An additional two Temple students will be working with us to bring ‘Voices’ to the North Central Youth Opportunity Center. In December, with the help of students from St. Joseph’s University, we hope to hear “Voices from Nueva Esperanza Charter School” and in the spring, Bryn Mawr and Haverford college students will facilitate “Voices from the West Philadelphia YOC.”

## **Articles from June 2001 UCCP Newsletter**

### **Youth Voices in Policy: UCCP Visits Chicago Partner**

*By Barbara Ferman, Director*

The UCCP recently launched an exciting project, *Youth Voices in Policy: Strategies for Engaging Youth in Civic Activities*. Funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, *Youth VIP* is a strategy for engaging youth in civic and community issues by linking up local research efforts

across cities. This joint effort between the UCCP and the Center for Urban Research and Learning at Loyola University (CURL) in Chicago involves extensive work with youth and community organizations in the two cities around community based research. Specifically, Youth VIP seeks to:

- Help youth to see the connections between their lives, their local community, and the broader society
- Transform youth into stakeholders in their local communities
- Provide youth with the necessary research and technological skills to understand policy and policy change
- Incorporate youth into a new approach in policy making, emphasizing university and community collaboration in completing policy research; and
- Build a network of engaged youth leaders across communities, cities and regions.

Barbara Ferman and Catherine Cavanaugh (UCCP), Patricia DeCarlo (Norris Square Civic Association) and Gary Paprocki (YES) met with CURL staff and their organizational partners (Cristo Rey High School and Latinos United) in Chicago. The meetings consisted of discussions about curricula, youth research, and technology infrastructure efforts in the two cities. Planning activities for a youth summit to be held in Chicago this fall were outlined. As an added treat, our visit included a trip to the Mexican Fine Arts Museum and a tour of Yollocali Youth Museum/90.5 Radio Arte. Our Chicago hosts were most gracious and made this trip extremely rich and productive. We look forward to working with our new partners!

## **Voices From YouthBuild: First Impressions and Final Reflections**

*By Cathy Smith, Program Developer, Youth Empowerment Services (YES) and  
Catie Cavanaugh, Youth Projects Coordinator, UCCP*

We met our students for the first time on a humid afternoon in September 2000. A crew of twelve youth were working diligently to construct a gazebo for residents from Grays Manor, a senior home located across the street from the school. We introduced ourselves, and after explaining that one of us was studying Urban Education a mere 3 blocks away at Temple, one student questioned, "Why doesn't Temple come here to talk with *us* about urban education?" Our learning had begun.

We designed a course, named by the students, Voices from YouthBuild, where we had the following goals:

- To connect the work students did on construction site to larger issues in the community;
- To promote critical analysis of community, issues of power, and the process of change;
- To provide students with a variety of research tools, enabling them to collect, analyze, and persuasively present their work, including their compelling prior knowledge;
- To demystify the policy making process and identify who made decisions;
- To build students' interest and confidence in their ability to be community leaders;
- To modify the pilot program in order to expand it the following year.

Now after nine months comes the inevitable moment of reflection....Perhaps the greatest source of accomplishment came from the authentic and enthusiastic relationships we formed with the students. Because we were able to be real with each other, we talked candidly about race, economics, justice, and the politics that underlie everything. We introduced them to numerous people and places in the community where those conversations could be enhanced. And in the end, with some student projects near completion, others far from it, we asked them what they learned from the experience. Students responded that they learned how to work independently or in a group, how to locate and talk to people in the community, how to find information they needed, how to design and give a survey, how to design and give a presentation, and how to say what they feel.

The course was far from perfect, and adjustments were made weekly to our curriculum, but in the end it was clear that each of us experienced some significant outcomes. As we embark on teaching the course again this summer (with the assistance of several of our YouthBuild students), we hope to continue to provide youth with a forum so their voices can be heard, impart them with new skills and knowledge, and allow decision makers to listen, learn and be challenged by another group of thoughtful and inspiring youth.